

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

April 6 - April 12, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK

Highlights:

Accountability:

- Nearly three months after the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Rohingya genocide case, the Myanmar President has asked civil servants, military officials and the general people "not to commit genocide".

Camp Conditions:

- At least 15 Rohingya refugees have died after a boat capsized in the Bay of Bengal.
- The Border Guard Bangladesh has intensified patrolling amid speculation of a fresh influx of Rohingyas from bordering Myanmar, as 150 Rohingya have appeared at the border. BGB has said they will not allow anyone to enter Bangladesh illegally.
- Bangladesh has imposed a "complete lockdown" in Cox's Bazar district, including the Rohingya camps, to halt the spread of coronavirus.

High-level Statements:

- The independent human rights expert who monitors Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, has condemned the crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and access to information that is related to ongoing armed conflict and risks undermining efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

International Support:

- The UK has announced around £21 million to support Bangladesh's efforts to fight the coronavirus outbreak and help preparedness in the Rohingya refugee camps.
- Britain has said it is pledging 200 million pounds (\$248 million) to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and charities to help slow the spread of the coronavirus in vulnerable countries and so help prevent a second wave of infections.

Developments:

[ActionAid wants government action for proper relief distribution](#) New Age Bangladesh (April 12)

ActionAid Bangladesh has said the government should undertake initiatives around COVID-19 relief operation with the continuation of social distancing. For this purpose, it said, a national plan of action including allocation of adequate fund for its implementation should be in place. In a statement, ActionAid emphasised ensuring the allocation of food support for daily-wage earners, street children, construction workers, and other informal sector workers including socially excluded groups such as dalit, sex workers, person with disabilities, and transgender people, among others. As per the guidelines from Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission and following the law enforcing agencies' last week statement, ActionAid has suspended its staff movement to the Rohingya camps and continuing essential services through Rohingya Volunteers since April 1.

Similar:

[Undertake national plan, allocation of adequate fund: ActionAid to govt](#) The Financial Express (Apr. 11)

[Don't commit genocide](#) The Daily Star (April 12)

Nearly three months after the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Rohingya genocide case, the Myanmar President has asked civil servants, military officials and the general people "not to commit genocide". In an order issued by Myanmar President's Office on April 8, it directed all ministries, regions and state governments "to ensure that its personnel, officers, staff -- whether military or other security forces, or civil services -- and locals, under its control or direction, do not commit the acts mentioned in Articles II and III of the Genocide Convention." The order says each ministry, region and state government shall transmit any credible information that it may receive from subordinates about possible acts to the president's office. They were also asked to provide a quarterly report on relevant developments.

Similar:

[Myanmar's Directives Not Enough to Protect Rohingya](#) Human Rights Watch (April 9)

[UK pledges 200m pounds in aid to help stop second virus wave](#) Prothom Alo (April 12)

Britain has said it is pledging 200 million pounds (\$248 million) to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and charities to help slow the spread of the coronavirus in vulnerable countries and so help prevent a second wave of infections. The British government said 130 million pounds would go to United Nations' agencies, with 65 million for the WHO. Another 50 million pounds would go to the Red Cross to help war-torn and hard to reach areas, and 20 million pounds to other organisations and charities. The cash would help areas with weak health systems such as war-ravaged Yemen, which has reported its first case, and Bangladesh, which is hosting 850,000 Rohingya refugees in crowded camps.

[Covid-19 will decimate the Rohingya refugee camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 12)

[op-ed] After all that they have gone through, the Rohingya are, like the rest of us, facing a killer even deadlier than the Myanmar military: The Covid-19 epidemic. In conditions like those the Rohingya are living in, in Cox's Bazar, containing the disease will be virtually impossible, once it appears. The Rohingya are living in conditions with more than 100,000 people per square mile, with virtually no space to isolate or quarantine anyone. No space even to limit human-to-human contact in any significant degree so as to slow down the spread of such an infectious disease. To say nothing of the limited scope for proper hygiene in the public spaces, or the very limited availability of medical supplies -- masks, disinfectant gels, etc. are effectively out of the question. So Cox's Bazar is a place where, if the virus gets in, virtually everyone in those camps is guaranteed to get it, and as many as 20% of those who get it are likely to die. We are talking 200,000 people. For that reason alone, as heartbreaking as it was, it was the right thing to do to put Cox's Bazar in lockdown. We do know at least from the experience of China so far that extreme measures such as this can hinder the transmission of the disease, and it is absolutely imperative that the virus is pre-empted from making its way into the Rohingya camps. Because if it does, all hell will break loose.

Similar:

[If coronavirus reaches Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, it will be a disaster](#) Asia News (Apr. 6)

[Thousands of Rohingya refugees likely to die from coronavirus, new report warns](#) The Telegraph (Apr. 6)

[Concern Grows Over Looming Coronavirus Risk at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh](#) Buddhist Door (Apr. 8)

[Fear of COVID-19 reaches Rohingya refugee camps](#) CGTN (Apr. 9)

[Covid-19 and Bangladesh: Looming Crisis in the Horizon](#) Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (Apr. 9)

[ICRC Concerned By COVID-19's Impact On Displaced Rohingya In Bangladesh – Official](#) Urdu Point (Apr. 8)



[Bangladesh intensifies patrol over Rohingya influx rumor](#) New Age Bangladesh (April 11)

The Border Guard Bangladesh has intensified patrolling amid speculation of a fresh influx of Rohingyas from bordering Myanmar. Local people at Palakhali union of Teknaf said that they heard that Rohingyas with Covid-19 were gathering along the border and started announcing through public announcement of the local mosques along the border at about midnight alerting so that none could enter Bangladesh territory.

Similar:

[Rohingya influx feared again, border on alert](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 10)

[Around 150 Rohingyas gather near Cox's Bazar border](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 10)

Around 150 Rohingyas may try to enter Bangladesh through the border at Anjumanpara area in Palongkhali union, said sources from Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and upazila administration in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar. Gafur Uddin Choudhury, Palongkhali UP chairman said the situation was discussed with BGB after they learned that around 150 Rohingyas are trying to trespass to Bangladesh through the border at Modir Khal area in Anjumanpara. "BGB are vigilant so that no more Rohingyas may enter the country. We have also heard that some Rohingyas are infected with the coronavirus (Covid-19). Maybe they are looking to get some treatment here." Cox's Bazar BGB battalion 34 Commanding Officer Lt Col Ali Haider Azad Ahmed said reinforcements were sent to Anjumanpara and none would be allowed illegal entry inside the country.

[Myanmar must allow free flow of info amid COVID-19: Yanghee Lee](#) Prothom Alo (April 10)

The independent human rights expert, who monitors Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, has condemned the crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and access to information that is related to ongoing armed conflict and risks undermining efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. "Censorship of the media at this time is deplorable. The right to access information is vital during the COVID-19 emergency in Myanmar, including in ethnic minority States. Furthermore, the right to seek, receive and impart information concerning health issues is a component of the right to health," Lee said.

[Bangladesh seeks Chinese medical experts](#) New Age Bangladesh (April 9)

Bangladesh requested that China send an expert medical team comprising doctors, nurses and technicians for treating COVID-19 and providing training to Bangladeshi medical professionals. Foreign minister AK Abdul Momen made the request during a telephone conversation with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, according to the foreign ministry.

[Online Exclusive: While Bangladesh grapples with a pandemic, measles remains below the radar](#) The Daily Star (April 9)

As Bangladesh struggles to allocate its stretched resources to fight the spread of Covid-19, which has already claimed 20 lives as per official estimates, children in the remote areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are falling victim to another disease—a highly contagious but preventable one—measles. According to newspaper reports, 10 children have already died in the CHT since the outbreak began on February 26, when the first death was reported. Another 300 children have been infected. The obvious question is: why? The Bangladesh government, along with WHO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Relief Web and UNICEF, are working to address this problem, as are many other organisations. Immunisation programmes have been undertaken in the Cox's Bazar region, but children keep falling victim to this menacing pestilence. Failure to vaccinate children, despite multiple immunisation initiatives, remains one of the major reasons why measles remains an elusive affair in the CHT. Even the government immunisation campaign that was supposed to vaccinate 34 million children between 9 months and 10 years for measles and rubella across the country had to be postponed in view of the continued spread of Covid-19. And with the immunisation programme postponed, people—especially the ones living in the high-risk or affected areas—are apprehensive. The locals have urged the government to take effective measures to address the situation in CHT. In this regard, a joint statement by Kapaeeng Foundation and the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum has also been released.

[**Coronavirus: Rohingya camps in Bangladesh put under 'complete lockdown'**](#) Straits Times (April 9)

Bangladesh has imposed a "complete lockdown" in Cox's Bazar district - home to over a million Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Myanmar - to halt the spread of coronavirus, officials said on April 9. Experts have warned that the disease could spread quickly through the cramped, sewage-soaked alleys where the persecuted Muslim minority are housed in canvas and bamboo shacks. No cases have been confirmed in the camps but one infection has been recorded nearby. Police and soldiers set up roadblocks on the main roads of the district, home to 3.4 million people including the Rohingya refugees, and have been conducting patrols inside and around the camps. Refugee commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder said movement restrictions on aid workers had also been imposed, cutting manpower by 80 per cent. "Only emergency food supply and medical services can continue work in the camps by maintaining extreme caution," he said.

Similar:

[Rohingya refugee camps on lockdown: So is Cox's Bazar](#) BDNews24 (April 10)

[Bangladesh Imposes COVID-19 Lockdown in District with Rohingya Camps](#) Radio Free Asia (Apr. 10)

[Bangladesh: Cox's Bazar under lockdown over coronavirus fear](#) AlJazeera (Apr. 8)

[Coronavirus: Rohingya camps in Bangladesh put under 'complete lockdown' to halt spread of COVID-19](#) Deccan Herald (Apr. 9)

[Coronavirus: Bangladesh locks down a million in Rohingya camps](#) BBC (Apr. 9)

[COVID-19: Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh put under 'complete lockdown'](#) The Hindu (Apr. 10)

[Rohingya camps in Bangladesh put under 'complete lockdown'](#) Arab News (Apr. 10)

[Bangladesh blocks Rohingya camps to keep virus out](#) Asia Times (Apr. 10)

[Rohingya camps in Bangladesh under lockdown](#) Telegraph India (Apr. 11)

[Covid-19 stalks world's largest refugee camp](#) Asia Times (Apr. 11) [op-ed]

[**Scores of detained Rohingya freed in Myanmar as virus fears mount**](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 9)

Cases against scores of Rohingya Muslims detained after fleeing Myanmar's Rakhine state have been dropped, as fears grow of a potential coronavirus outbreak in the country's overcrowded prisons. The Rohingya who remain in Rakhine live under tight restrictions with little access to healthcare and education, unable to move freely in conditions Amnesty International has branded "apartheid". For years many have taken to boats and buses to escape. But in recent months, hundreds have been caught and detained in prisons -- charged with breaching immigration laws, offences which carry up to two years in jail. This week, a court suddenly dropped cases against two of the largest groups of arrested Rohingya, totaling 128 people.

Similar:

[Myanmar frees scores of Rohingya as virus fears mount](#) New Age Bangladesh (Apr. 9)

[Amid coronavirus scare, Myanmar court releases scores of detained Rohingya Muslims](#) Scroll.in (Apr. 9)

[Myanmar frees 128 Rohingyas amid virus](#) The Manila Times (Apr. 12)

[**One ventilator for 93,273 people: Save the Children**](#) The Daily Star (April 7)

Save the Children has made an urgent call for international assistance to help Bangladesh meet a surge in demand for ventilators amid the Covid-19 outbreak and to avert a humanitarian disaster in the country. The call comes at a time when 164 people were found infected with coronavirus, of whom have 17 died. There are fears that the numbers would go up in the coming days despite a shutdown across the country since March 26. There are reportedly 1,769 ventilators in Bangladesh at this moment or in the pipeline, which means an average of one ventilator for every 93,273 people. Save the Children also expressed concerns for the estimated 3.3 million people who live in Cox's Bazar in southeastern Bangladesh, a million of whom are Rohingya refugees living in cramped conditions with limited access to adequate hygiene and health facilities.



Similar:

[COVID-19: Bangladesh has less than 2,000 ventilators serving a population of 165m, warns Save the Children](#) Save the Children (Apr. 7)

[‘Help Bangladesh meet demand for ventilators’](#) The Daily Star (April 8)

[QRCS protects refugee camps in Bangladesh against Coronavirus](#) ReliefWeb (April 7)

In response to the global Coronavirus outbreak, the representation mission of Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) in Bangladesh is working together with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and other National Societies operating in Bangladesh to protect the population and the Myanmar refugees. A humanitarian intervention was launched to help 106 health workers and 1,800 families (10,800 individuals) at refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. There are plans to increase the number of beneficiaries, in cooperation with the partners.

[Bangladesh: COVID-10 response flaws put older Rohingya refugees in imminent danger](#) Amnesty International (April 6)

Older Rohingya refugees in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh are being left behind in the humanitarian response to COVID-19, which could have devastating consequences given the high risks older people everywhere face from this deadly pandemic, Amnesty International has said. Bangladesh, together with the UN and other humanitarian partners, has made efforts to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading to the camps outside Cox's Bazar, including a decision, as of 23 March, to increase COVID-19-specific assistance, stop large gatherings, and order preventative measures. But basic, accurate information about the illness and measures to prevent its spread is failing to reach many people in the camps, and especially older people, as the humanitarian response pays insufficient attention to their specific needs.

Similar:

[Older Rohingya refugees in Imminent COVID-19 danger: Amnesty International](#) BDnews24 (Apr. 7)

[Rohingya children fight back against COVID-19, one pair of hands at a time](#) UNICEF (April 6)

For the more than 850,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar living in cramped conditions in what is effectively the world's largest refugee camp, keeping some distance from other members of the community is easier said than done. Many refugees live in flimsy bamboo and tarpaulin shelters where the dangers of everyday life remain all too real, including the high risk of the spread of infectious diseases. This doesn't mean that there aren't precautions those living in Cox's Bazar can take to minimize the risk of contracting diseases like COVID-19. In fact, many of the children there have already been doing one of the most important things they can to protect themselves: washing their hands thoroughly and regularly. UNICEF and partners have moved quickly to establish basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, helping to contain the risk of a major disease outbreak. In addition, by the end of 2019, UNICEF had set up around 2,500 learning centres, each equipped with a handwashing station providing soap and clean water, which made it possible to reach hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children with lessons on good health and hygiene – including how to wash their hands properly. Even though the learning centres have been temporarily shut as a precaution against COVID-19, UNICEF continues to distribute essential supplies through its WASH programme, providing safe water and soap for around 240,000 Rohingya refugees – over half of whom are children.

[Bangladesh citizen held in UP's Mahoba](#) United News of India (April 6)

A Bangladesh citizen has been arrested by the police in a suspicious state in the Sadar Kotwali area of his Uttar Pradesh District. Deputy Superintendent of Police Jatashankar Rao said that a Rohingya youth from Bangladesh who was hiding one-and-half kilometers away from the railway station was caught upon receiving information from locals. He was present on the spot from the past several days and due to the police movement amidst the lockdown, he could not get away. In the absence of food and water, his condition was also getting worse.

[Fishing boat takes 202 Rohingyas to Malaysia](#) New Age Bangladesh (April 6)

Malaysia has detained 202 suspected Rohingya Muslims who arrived illegally by boat, a top official said, raising fears that people smugglers are back in action despite the coronavirus pandemic. Zulinda Ramly, deputy director with the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, said a large fishing boat ferried the suspected Rohingya migrants to the northern resort island of Langkawi. Zulinda said the migrants were detained by maritime authorities for questioning and will be handed over to immigration officials.

Similar:

[Malaysia: Hundreds of Rohingya seeking safety by boat at acute risk from coronavirus](#) Amnesty International (April 8)

[Rohingya hail Anadolu Agency as 'voice of oppressed'](#) Anadolu Agency (April 6)

Rohingya genocide survivors and leaders of the persecuted community across the globe have recalled the Anadolu Agency as the voice of oppressed on the occasion of its 100th founding anniversary. "Since the beginning of the Rohingya crisis, Anadolu Agency has been playing an important role in the frontline to bring the plights of Rohingya to the world while other new agencies fail to cover," Dr. Hla Kyaw, Chairman of European Rohingya Council, said in a written message on eve of the centenary. Anadolu Agency was officially launched on April 6, 1920, 17 days before the Turkish Grand National Assembly convened for the first time. "On behalf of Rohingya and European Rohingya Council, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the team of Anadolu Agency," said Kyaw, who characterized Anadolu Agency coverage of Rohingya plights as extraordinary. Free Rohingya Coalition Coordinator, Dr. Maung Zarni, urged the agency to "play a more effective [role] in educating its global multilingual audiences with bite-sized social media pieces on many issues of importance to the peoples around the world."

Similar:

[Bangladeshi ministers hail Anadolu Agency's success](#) Anadolu Agency (Apr. 6)

[UK announces 21m pounds in virus funds for Bangladesh](#) BDNews24 (April 6)

The UK has announced around £21 million to support Bangladesh's efforts to fight the coronavirus outbreak and help preparedness in the Rohingya refugee camps. The funds include £7 million to multiple partners, such as UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, to help prepare the national health system, including logistics and supplies of personal protective equipment for health workers, laboratory supplies for testing and oxygen support in hospitals, the British High Commission said in a statement. The UK will give £3 million to UNDP to reach at least 2.16 million people in urban slums across 20 cities with awareness raising information and hand-washing facilities. Over £1 million will go to BRAC which has mobilised a nationwide network of 50,000 health workers and volunteers to raise awareness of COVID-19 in their communities. More than £10 million will go to the United Nations and NGO partners to maintain essential humanitarian services and prepare the Rohingya and host communities for COVID-19.

Similar:

[UK to provide £21 million to Bangladesh to fight COVID-19](#) New Age Bangladesh (Apr. 6)
[Coronavirus: UK to give Tk218 crore in aid to Bangladesh](#) Dhaka Tribune (Apr. 6)

[Fears for spread of coronavirus in refugee camps as up to 250 people share one tap – Oxfam](#) ReliefWeb (April 6)

Refugees living in camps are sharing one tap between up to 250 people and many have less than 3.5 square metres of living space per person, which will make it extremely difficult to contain a coronavirus outbreak, Oxfam has said. The virus could also be catastrophic for people in places hit by conflicts, like Yemen, Syria and South Sudan, who are already struggling with malnutrition, diseases like cholera and a lack of clean water and health facilities. The standards for refugee camps, were not designed to cope with a global pandemic. The standards state that there should be one tap for no more than 250 people and 3.5 square metres of living space per person. In some cases, even these minimum requirements are not met. The sprawling Rohingya refugee camp at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh is severely



overcrowded with 40,000 people per square kilometre. Malnutrition and diseases like dysentery, cholera and typhoid are already a high risk in Cox's Bazar, undermining the health of the communities. There is also very limited access to basic health services, let alone more specialized care. Oxfam is also concerned about risk of gender-based violence as families are forced to remain in their already cramped shelters and support centres and networks are closed.

Similar:

[The world's refugee camps are a coronavirus disaster in waiting](#) Economist (Apr. 6)

[Fearing Coronavirus, Refugees in Crowded Camps Have Nowhere to Hide](#) The Wall Street Journal (Apr. 7)

['Everyone at risk' as coronavirus cases tick up among migrants and refugees sheltering in Greece](#) Modern Diplomacy (Apr. 7)

[Coronavirus outbreaks pose heightened threat to refugees, Oxfam warns](#) The National (Apr. 6)

[COVID-19 Pandemic: How Can Refugees & Asylum Seekers Be Protected?](#) The Quint (Apr. 7) [op-ed]

[Glavin: Global South braces for the devastation of COVID-19 with few ways to fight it](#) Ottawa Citizen (Apr. 8) [op-ed]

[COVID-19 Global Roundup: Impact on refugee and migrant camps](#) CGTN (Apr. 8)

[COVID-19 and Humanitarian Access for Refugees and IDPs: Part 2 – Syria and Bangladesh](#) Just Security (Apr. 9)

[The Danger of COVID-19 for Refugees](#) The New Yorker (Apr. 10)

[Wrestling With COVID-19 Risks in Refugee Camps](#) VOA News (Apr. 11)

In compiling this digest, RSN has attempted to include the most relevant news accounts from the past week concerning Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. From time to time, news beyond Bangladesh or the Rohingya community is included, but currently RSN does not have the capacity to expand the scope. We recognize that some developments may have been overlooked, and that some sources may not be viewed by all as credible or balanced. Inclusion of a news story and its summary does not constitute any kind of endorsement or position taken by RSN, and the text and positions included in the above are solely those of the authors of the respective articles. If you have any comments or feedback for us regarding this digest, please email advocacy@rsn.ngo. For more information about RSN and our work, please visit <https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/>